

Tethered by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst with a Happy Ending, Brothers, Emotional Roller Coaster, Family Feels, Father-Daughter Relationship, Gen, Healing, Hurt/Comfort, I have a lot of feelings, I just have so many feelings about El and Hop okay, Mentions of past abuse, Nightmares, leave me be, mileven if you squint, mostly just angst though

Language: English

Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers & Will Byers

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Summary:

With everything these kids have been through, nightmares are expected. It was just a matter of time.

A WIP set of comfort drabbles.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

I have so many feelings about Eleven and Hopper
you guys

The first time El had a nightmare at the cabin, Hopper nearly went into cardiac arrest.

There was a clamor, a *crash*, like shattering glass from somewhere in the conscious world, and his eyes flew open with a gasp and a skipping heart. He sat bolt upright, breath caught somewhere in his throat as his heart hammered loudly in his ears, his stomach knotted into tight coils somewhere in his gut. His eyes scanned the cabin instinctively, flicking from the door to the kitchen to the TV and back. It took him a moment to process what he saw.

The television was floating. Bobbing up in down in midair, it resembled a balloon, tethered down by nothing more than the power cord still plugged in low on the wall. It wasn't just the television, though—all around the room, things hovered over the floor, pressed up against the ceiling, and everything in between. As if gravity didn't apply to them, anymore. As if the floor was a magnet and they were *repelled* from it. As if there was some invisible force keeping them there. Lamps and the coffee table, blankets and cushions, that one recliner El loved to curl up into so much. Quivering slightly as they floated, as if charged up with some otherworldly energy. Unstable.

The lights flashed on and Hopper forced his eyes shut, the sudden bright fluorescents momentarily blinding him. It only lasted a moment before they blinked off, almost as suddenly as they'd come. Hopper saw through his eyelids and opened his eyes again, still squinting slightly. When the lights flickered on again, then off, then on then off, he managed to keep them open. Across the cabin, there was a scream, a single word, "*No!*", and across the room a lamp shot through the air and crashed into the wall, shattering on impact.

He covered his face against the falling shards, and his mind finally caught up with the situation. He shot up off the couch, and within

seconds, he was crossing into El's room, carefully avoiding ramming into the still-floating furniture. The lights continued to flicker, his heart continued to race.

A lump formed in his throat when he caught sight of her. Hair, still short but growing in dark ringlets, plastered to her forehead and neck, slick with sweat and trembling. The sheets, tangled around her feet as she thrashed and kicked, like restraints. Her fingers, curled into the mattress and gripping the fitted sheets under her in clenched, white-knuckled fists. Her face, pinched and pained, normally so wide-eyed and clear now contorted in what Hop could only consider *grief*. Tears, streaming from her eyes and rolling to her pillow, staining it with pools of wet. Blood, trickling from her nose in vivid contrast to her pale skin.

She was screaming, sobbing, words that Hopper couldn't quite catch but broke his heart all the same. They cut through his head like a knife, Eleven's screams. Loud and raw and terrified. He wasn't sure he'd ever be able to get them out of his head. The memory of them, the echo of them... He was sure it would haunt him.

He sank down to the bed next to her small, struggling form, reaching for her carefully. "El," he said quietly, trying to keep his voice gentle but steady. "Kid, come on—it's okay." But when he touched her arm, she flinched away from the contact with her entire body, shaking her head and clenching tighter in on herself.

"No," she sobbed again, and the lights flared again, a lightbulb across the room *popping* sharply into darkness. Shattered. "No, Papa! No..."

His heart lurched as he reached for her again, but thought better of it and let his hand drop uselessly to the bed beside her. "El, kiddo, you—you gotta wake up." The words were louder, than before, but still not loud enough to overpower her sobs. He tried again, gritting his teeth despite the way his eyes started to sting. "Please, honey—you have to wake *up*. It's okay, kid."

Her scream hitched off into a sob, and she shook her head with desperation. She resorted to *pleading*, begging, "Please, please no, Papa, please..."

Something sharp clenched at him, and he wasn't sure if it was despair or a murderous anger filling his chest. Still, it was enough, and he reached for her once more, wrapping warm fingers around her shaking shoulders. Her t-shirt was cold and wet with sweat under his fingers, and it brought goosebumps to his arms. "El. *El*—wake up! Jane. Jane!"

And her eyes flew open. A lot happened, in that one instant. Her eyes opened, and they were red, and bloodshot, and wide and *hurt*, but she was awake and looking at him and Hopper could swear his heart stopped beating. The lights, which had been flickering uncontrollably, flaring in her emotion, blinked off all at once. The furniture, which had been floating in the air and flying unstably around the cabin, came down with a *crash*. And El, a scream still on her lips, drew in a breath and held it, tear tracks staining her cheeks and chin wobbling. She stared at him with wavering eyes.

The sudden silence, the stillness, held them there. Frozen like a painting. And then her expression crumbled again, and the world started turning, and in the darkness, Hopper pulled her into the safety of his arms. She curled into him, trembling.

"It's okay," he mumbled into her hair. "Everything's alright, kid. He's gone. He's gone and he's never touching you again, you hear me?" There wasn't a response, just a shudder and a snuffle from the girl, who had her face buried in his chest. He rubbed her back, swallowing, and shook his head. "You're okay, you're okay. I'm here. You're safe, kid. I promise."

They stayed like that, for a while. Until Hopper's heart stopped pounding in his ears, until El's sobs faded into small snuffles and too-even breaths. Until he felt that fist of *fear* unclench from around his heart, and she pulled away from him slightly to wipe her eyes.

He excused himself for a moment as she composed herself, returning quickly with a glass of water and a cool, damp facecloth. She was sitting up, now, staring across the darkened room with wide, puffy eyes, still sniffing slightly. Hop flicked the lights on—she didn't even flinch, so lost in that head of hers—and settled down next to her on the bed. He handed her the glass of water.

She took it, still without looking at him, eyes dark and far away. Her hand shook as she brought it to her lips, but sipped at it slowly. Swallowing, she finally tore her gaze from the wall to regard Hopper softly. “Thank you.”

He smiled a little, despite the way some new sadness ached in his bones. He brushed a few strands of sweat-soaked hair from her forehead, before lifting the facecloth to gently wipe the blood from under her nose. She closed her eyes against the touch, and when he drew back, face cleaned, she leaned into his arm, face pressed against his shoulder, breathing.

It took Hopper a minute to know what to do next. He never... with Sara, she never—she was too *young*, for nightmares. He didn’t know how to *handle* nightmares. Especially not nightmares of this magnitude. Nightmares caused by over a decade of abuse and isolation, locked up all alone in that cold, unforgiving lab.

He swallowed after a moment. “Do you... want to talk about it?” he questioned gently. He’d never asked what happened to her, in that lab, and he never would. But, hell—she should at least know someone was there to listen, if she wanted to talk about it.

She looked up at him slowly, sniffing slightly, eyes as wide as ever but clearer, now, too. Less bloodshot. Her eyebrows drew together slightly. “Talk about it?” she repeated, like a question.

He nodded slightly, shifting on the bed to face her more. “Yeah, talk about it. The nightmare.”

She hesitated a little at that, and Hopper knew it was because the word is familiar, but new, and it still took her a minute to wrap her head around things like that sometimes. “Nightmare,” she repeated quietly, and pulled the teddy that had been abandoned into her lap. She looked at him again, quizzically and sad. “Why?”

Hop frowned a little, his own eyebrows drawing together slightly. “Why did you have a nightmare?” he asked. God, if that wasn’t a loaded question.

But El shook her head, hands tightening slightly on the bear. “No,

why... talk about it?"

Her eyes were wide and soft, but there was still that lingering pain in them that Hopper felt like a kick to the gut. He exhaled and swiped a hand over his face tiredly. "I guess, kid—it makes people feel better, sometimes. To talk about stuff like that."

She bit her lip, gaze drifting and then refocusing before she spoke again. "Even bad stuff?"

He nodded, letting the dirtied facecloth drop to his feet. "Especially the bad stuff. Makes people feel like they're not so alone." She'd never had that, he knew. She'd never had someone to confide in, someone to talk about the bad stuff with. That's why it was such an unfamiliar concept to her. He wondered how many times she'd had nightmares in that damn lab and woken up from them, all alone. It made him sick.

But she wasn't alone anymore. She had him, and Joyce, and even Mike and the rest of the boys. And he'd be damned if he was going to allow her to ever feel alone like that again.

She watched him carefully before her chin started trembling again, slightly. "I'm not alone, anymore," she said quietly, and her voice was still soft but full of emotion. Apparently, she was on the same wavelength that he was. "I have you. And Mike. My friends."

Hopper nodded to her, but couldn't help the warmth he felt in his chest at the words. "You're damn right, kiddo."

And she smiled a little at that, despite the pain that still lingered behind her eyes. She always loved it, when he called her that. She glanced down at her fingers, still curled tightly around the bear. Her smile wavered, fading slightly. "I don't want to talk about it," she admitted quietly, and looked back up at him. She winced, unsure. "Is... that okay?"

Something heavy still settled in his gut, he nodded again, brushing some more stray hair from her forehead. "Of course that's okay, kid." He didn't really expect anything else. "I just, uh. Want to make sure you know the option's there, if you ever want to."

Her expression was still tentative, though. “Still... not alone?”

And that just about broke his heart. He pulled her to his side, pressing a kiss to her damp head. “Never again, El. You’re never gonna be alone like that again, as far as I’m concerned.”

She nodded slightly, a small smile tugging on her lips. “Safe,” she murmured, and leaned into his side.

Something uncoiled in Hop’s chest, and he could finally breathe, again. He exhaled deeply, and nodded. “Yeah, kid. You’re safe.”

He stayed like that, with her, until her breathing grew deep and her eyes fluttered shut in her exhaustion. He placed the glass of water on the bedside table and gently pulled a clean blanket over her, tossing the sweat-drenched ones to the corner, for the time being. She was asleep, soundly, and he brushed her hair back gently with his fingers, away from her face.

A face not contorted in despair, anymore. Soft features, quiet and peaceful as she laid there, wearing one of Hopper’s old shirts and curling into the blankets. He nodded a little to himself, as he watched her. A tsunami of otherworldly power, sure. But still soft and scarred and frightened. A little girl. *His* little girl.

Again, he pressed a kiss to her hair and nodded to himself, resolutely.

“I’m gonna keep you safe,” he told her, and he said it like a promise.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

Will's scared he's going to self-destruct. Jonathon won't let that happen.

Notes for the Chapter:

Recognize that Will isn't okay!! Recognize it's okay for him to not be okay!!! That's when you heal!!!
Brotherly bonding!! Ok that is all

“You don’t draw anymore.”

It was more of a statement than a question, really.

Will dragged his gaze up from the comic in his hands to look at Jonathon. Leaning on the doorframe to Will’s bedroom with crossed arms, the older brother’s eyes were clouded with only partially-concealed concern. He nodded to where Will sat on the bed, reading, and crossed the room towards him. “You read a lot more, now. Instead of drawing.”

A lump started forming in Will’s throat, something tightening in his chest. He swallowed it down as Jonathon sank down to the bed beside him, taking a small breath. “I’ve always liked reading,” he pointed out, and his voice was, for the most part, steady. Still, he couldn’t find it in himself to quite catch his brother’s eye.

Jonathon tilted his head in a slight nod, sighing, but a small smile tugging on his lips nonetheless. “Okay, *sure*, but—” he squinted slightly, tugging the now-closed comic out of Will’s hands and scanning the cover, “—pretty sure this is the third time this week you’ve read this one. And I hate to break it to you, but I don’t think the story’s gonna change by rereading it.”

Anxiety still coiled in his chest, Will took the comic back. “I like this one,” he said defensively, his own eyes scanning the cover. The big, tilted block letters reading “The Uncanny X-MEN” across the top, the

majority of the cover filled with orange silhouettes of the team, surrounded by yellow flames in the shape of a phoenix. And in the center, an angry, vengeful Jean Grey, hand outstretched and red hair wild. *Heroes and Hellfire*, it read at the bottom. Heroes and Hellfire and Hawkins, Will thought.

He pointed vaguely to Jean, eyebrows drawing together as he tilted the comic for Jonathon to see. His brother leaning over his shoulder, he sighed and explained. "This is Jean Grey, and in the issues before this, she's being controlled by Mastermind."

Jonathon's eyebrows drew together slightly. "But... not in this issue?" he asked, and it was controlled and careful. Cautious.

The younger brother tilted his head from side to side, a halfway nod. "Sort of," he replied, and swallowed again. "For the first part of it she is. Towards the end she realizes what's happening and manages to break out of Mastermind's grasp." He flips the comic open to one of the last pages, finger pointing and tracing from panel to panel to illustrate what he'd said.

Beside him, Jonathon smiled a little, eyes trailing Will's finger. "What happens then?"

Will took a breath, and it was shaky, and he closed the comic and set it aside with a furrowed brow. When he spoke again, his voice was smaller. "She dies," he confided, before shaking his head slightly and backtracking. "I mean, a bunch of stuff happens in between that, but basically she betrays her friends and family, flies to a new galaxy, causes a supernova that kills an entire planet and eventually she just..." he trailed off, and took another unsteady breath. "Self-destructs."

Jonathon stiffened beside him, and silence settled around them. Will wrung his hands together.

It was a new habit, of his, a new mannerism. He never did it purposefully, but he noticed it happened a lot after they get that *thing* out of his head. It was like—it was almost like a reassurance that he was *Will*, that he was *himself*, that he was in control. There was a near-constant chill in his bones, these days, and an infuriating tremor

in his hands that wouldn't go away. He did it without meaning to, but it warmed his hands slightly and stopped them from trembling, so Will found comfort in it.

"I've tried to," he admitted quietly, after a moment. He could feel Jonathon's eyes flick to him, but couldn't force himself to meet his brother's gaze. He lowered his own to his fingers and frowned deeper. "Draw, I mean. I've tried."

He waited a moment for Jonathon to say something—*anything*, at this point—but his words were met with nothing but silence. He swallowed again, a lead weight in his stomach. "It makes my chest feel all tight," he continued quietly, "like I—like I can't *breathe*." His eyes still trailed on his own hands, but he didn't see them. Not really.

The older brother stayed silent for a moment longer before placing a hand on Will's bent knee gently. "It's okay to be scared."

Will exhaled, ragged and uneven, and he closed his eyes. His breath was caught in his throat, and his heart thumped heavily in his chest. "What if he comes *back*?"

"He won't." The words were steady, sure.

"He could."

"The gate's closed, Will. He's not coming back."

Will's jaw tightened, and he felt frustrated tears touch the line of his lashes. "You don't know that."

Then there was a warm hand covering his, and he opened his eyes again. Jonathon shifted on the bed to face him more directly, and his steady brown gaze met Will's wavering one. "I'll tell you what I *do* know, then," he began, and his voice was insistent but still oddly gentle "I know that we're never letting that *thing* touch you, if it ever does come back. Which it *won't*. Alright? We wouldn't even give it the chance."

Will swallowed, but the adamancy in his brother's words did little to comfort him. His stomach was still in coils, his heart was still heavy. He pressed his lips together and felt his eyes lose focus, biting down

on the wobble in his chin. “What if you can’t stop it?” he exhaled, and shook his head. “What if there’s nothing you can do, and he comes *back*, and he gets—” He broke off, his words catching in his throat, voice breaking. “And he *gets me*?” The words were little more than a whisper, barely audible. “And he *uses* me again?”

Jonathon squeezed his hands, and Will felt his gaze drift and refocus on him, burning. “If we can’t do anything to stop it,” he said steadily, evenly, “then we know someone who *can*.”

Will swallowed, steadying his chin once more. “El.”

“She wasn’t... around, the last time,” he continued slowly, “and I know you only just actually met her, but—”

“She saved me,” Will cut his brother off, and nodded, something easing in his chest. “Twice, now. I trust her.”

A smile made its way onto Jonathon’s face, tugging at his lips. “So do I,” he agreed easily. “And we’d know what we’d be up against, if it did come back—that it’s not just some... hallucination, or flashback, you know? That it’s real, not just in your head. So if anything were to happen—which it *won’t*,” he added with emphasis, “—we’ll... be better prepared, for it.”

Still, Will hesitated, dropping his head slightly. His eyes were hidden by the line of his bangs.

“Hey,” Jonathon eased, and his voice was earnest, “hey, look at me.” It took him a moment, but slowly, Will dragged his gaze up. Jonathon’s eyes were honest. “It’s okay to be scared. And—this?” He reached over and took the comic from where it laid, abandoned at the foot of the bed. “This?” he repeated, and shook the comic gently. “Isn’t going to happen. You’re not gonna self-destruct.”

Will looked away again, quickly bringing a hand to wipe the moisture from his cheeks. He swallowed and nodded. Breathed deeply for a moment, gradually growing steadier with each exhalation. “Yeah,” he agreed quietly, after a moment, and his gaze found his brother’s once more. “Yeah. Okay.”

The corner of Jonathon's mouth twitched into a small, crooked smile, and he ruffled the younger brother's hair lightly before pulling him to his side. Will leaned into his warm frame, Jonathon humming somewhere low in his chest, and it rumbled softly against Will's ear. "I'm glad you're back."

If Will's head wasn't so close, he might've missed his brother's words. But he didn't, and he found himself smiling despite the tightness that lingered in his chest. The doubt, the fear. "Yeah," he agreed, nodding as Jonathon's arm tightened slightly around his shoulders. "Me too."

And he was.

And when Jonathon finally left, Will's eyes drifted to the desk across the room. Littered with the tools he'd used to channel the interdimensional demon residing in his head, the desk had been all but abandoned since his return. But he found himself sighing and standing up, crossing his room and settling down to the chair slowly. Carefully. He picked up a red crayon, swallowing down the quiver in his throat.

He began to draw.

Across Hawkins, in the depths of the trees, shadows stirred in the darkness.

Notes for the Chapter:

The X-Men comic referenced in this chapter is X-Men #134, which is the issue Will told Dustin he'd take in the pilot episode for winning the bike race back to Dustin's house (right before he was taken by the Demogorgon, my poor CHILD). A lot of people associate El with Jean Grey, which I love, but I thought, in this case, it was a bit fitting for Will to identify with that issue in particular

Author's Note:

Okay so this is super angsty but it's gonna keep going and chapter by chapter it's gonna be different

characters, different situations, different everything
because PAIN LEADS TO HEALING and I just want
my children to be happy okay thanks bye